M. Phil Synopsis

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Summary

The Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir came into being by Treaty of Amritsar concluded on 16 March 1846 between the East India Company and Gulab Singh. The Treaty transferred to Gulab Singh a vast area situated to the east of the river Indus and west of the river Ravi into his independent possession. Gulab Singh in return was required to acknowledge the supremacy of the British Indian government and to pay a sum of seventy-five lakhs of rupees (*nanakshahee*). The natural outcome of this Treaty was that three distinct territories-Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh were clubbed together to form this new state. As the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir was empowered with a greater degree of autonomy in the internal affairs of the State, it had a very detrimental impact on the economy of Kashmir. Maharaja Gulab Singh immediately after ascending the throne and later on his successors declared Kashmir as their private property on the plea that they had paid a hefty amount to purchase it from the Britishers. As a result, each and everything valuable in state was declared by Maharaja as state property owing to which people faced untold miseries during the Dogra period especially in early Dogra period (1846-1885).

Nature has embellished Kashmir with bountiful resources hardly surpassed by any neighbouring region. However, the most significant factor which distinguishes Kashmir from others is its unique topography. Owing to this, Kashmir has fertile soils, moist and warm temperature and abundant water resources which have helped the Kashmiris for ages to practice agriculture as the chief source of employment. Moreover, surrounded by all sides by massive mountain ramparts restricted the free movement of goods and people and thereby forced the people to opt for agriculture. Consequently, agriculture has always been the main occupation of the people. It was, therefore, not surprising that in the second half of the nineteenth century that more than 75% population of Kashmir province was entirely dependent on agriculture. Not only this, even those who earned their livelihood from secondary occupations took great interest in agriculture for food and raw materials. Keeping in view all these facts, it can safely be assumed that agriculture was the main sector around which the whole economy revolved during this period. However, what puzzles a curious mind is that why a land full of promises witnessed an agrarian crisis during this period? Why this crisis merely due to natural factors or was it aided and abetted by the callousness of the

state? The answer to these vexed questions is not difficult to seek and can easily be discerned by looking at the various aspects of the agrarian economy of this period.

The agriculture in Kashmir during this period was dominated by the cultivation of food crops and there were only a few commercial crops that were cultivated. Although a large variety of Kharif crops (Rice, Maize, Ganhar, Millet, Buckwheat, Pulses, Chillies), Rabi crops (Wheat, Tibet Barley, Opium, Rape, Flax, Beans, Peas) and commercial crops (Cotton, Saffron, Tobacco, Poppy, Tilgogal, Sarson) were cultivated in Kashmir. However, it was rice that had a vital significance in the Kashmir economy as it not only the staple food of local people but also the main source of revenue to the State. As a natural result, peasants devoted their all energy and resources to rice cultivation. A contemporary official Walter Lawrence has therefore rightly remarked that "the cultivator devotes all his energy to this crop." Owing to the great commercial value of rice, Maharaja Gulab Singh abolished the private sale of rice and made its sale a State monopoly. To procure a large and regular supply of rice to feed the urban people, peasants were forced to pay their revenue in terms of rice. This large supply of rice was stored in Shali stores which were established in Srinagar and other towns and accordingly sold at exorbitant rates. This had a detrimental impact on the peasantry as in absence of a private market they had to sell it solely to the State at the price fixed by the State. Keeping in view the importance of land revenue for the smooth functioning of the State economy, Maharaja extracted a large proportion of everything produced by soil. The state was so much brazen in taxing the peasantry that except for water and air everything was taxed.

Not satisfied with this, various types of perquisites commonly known as *rasum* were exacted from the hapless peasantry. Therefore, a peasant was forced not only to surrender a portion of land produce with various ruthless officials, but he was also supposed to share his poultry, cattle, wealth, domestic-made blankets, ghee, fodder especially grass, wood and timber, and almost everything which he produced. Therefore, by surrendering a major portion of produce to the State and its officials, the peasant was left with a very small portion of his produce. Moreover, the revenue collecting machinery employed by the State was dominated by Kashmiri Pandits. This revenue collecting machinery was corrupt and cruel and not only employed violent methods but also collected more than what a peasant was required to pay to State. In such gloomy circumstances, it was not surprising that a peasant had to live on

vegetables, wild fruit and other sub-standard kinds of diet and often became an easy prey of devastating famines and epidemics.

The importance of irrigation for a State heavily dependent on the agrarian sector can easily be imagined but the Dogra State by brazenly displaying its reckless nature showed a very cold response to expand the facilities of irrigation. As a result, the crops grown were largely dependent on natural sources of irrigation. The water of Jhelum, Sandran, Lidar, Vishau, Rambiarah, Dood Ganga and Pohru rivers was used by the peasants to irrigate their fields. Moreover, Streams, dams, canals and springs were also used throughout the length and breadth of Kashmir Valley. However, in the areas dotted with Karewa lands as well as areas where these sources of irrigation were absent, lift irrigation system (*Toulsag*) was employed to irrigate the fields. Moreover, the tools and implements used by the peasants for agricultural operations were outdated and simple. The tools were manufactured in tune with the landforms, crops cultivated and the raw material available. However, the major raw material for the manufacture of agricultural tools was the use of local wood of various kinds. It was a common practice amongst the peasantry to use dry wood for the manufacture of tools and implements to avoid the shrinking of tools. To make the tools strong and viable for various agricultural practices, different parts of the same tool were made out of different plant types. These traditional tools were manufactured by local carpenters (*chhan*) and iron smiths (*ahangar*) with great skill and dexterity. Added to this, low quality seeds and manures were used. No State assistance in the form of loans was given to them. This traditional agrarian technology was the outcome of the lack of State patronage and the utter ignorance of the peasants.

The most obnoxious practice that heavily plagued the agrarian sector of Kashmir was begar (forced labour). The absence of roads and modern means of communication in Kashmir and the meagre resources at the disposal of the government forced it to employ local people on forced labour for carriage and construction purposes. Although begar was not an innovation of the Dogra Period, however, this period witnessed an unprecedented increase in the magnitude and misuse of begar. The burden of this practice was mainly borne by the rural people as a large section of the population especially urban artisan classes, cultivators working on the lands of Kashmiri Pandits, Sikh jagirdars, Dharmarth Department, enjoyed exemption from begar. This practice had such a detrimental impact on Kashmir that there was hardly a family in Kashmir

particularly in rural Kashmir which did not face the tragic disappearance of some male member deployed on begar. However, what was more devastative was the deployment of peasants on the begar during the peak season of agriculture. Owing to the absence of peasants from their villages, the land remained either uncultivated or the peasants failed to harvest their crops on time. As a result, not only the peasantry suffered but the land revenue of the State also dwindled. According to Walter Lawrence, "nothing has done more to ruin Kashmir" than begar. Hardly surprising Walter Lawrence strongly advocated the abolition of begar in all objectionable forms.

Keeping in view such firm State control over the resources of Kashmir and the oppressive attitude of State machinery, it was natural to have a discontented peasantry that always wanted to migrate to neighbouring States to get redemption from such a hostile and oppressive environment. However, the State government had appointed guards at all important entry and exit points of Kashmir to stop the migration of people. As a result, people often had to trudge unknown and very tortuous and tough routes to reach the neighbouring States. But this is not to suggest that the local peasantry did not raise their voice against such a harsh scenario. Since it was difficult if not impossible to organize the violent forms of protest against the Dogra State, therefore, they expressed their anguish in non-violent forms. The Kashmiri folk literature is replete with instances which transparently reflect the agonies and anxieties of the peasantry of Kashmir. It is important to mention here that apart from migration to neighbouring States, peasants also submitted petitions before Maharaja and his officials to get their grievances redressed. However, much to the chagrin of peasantry their petitions were hardly heeded and fulfilled.

Review of Literature

Keeping in view the importance of this theme in Kashmir history, it has been a subject of interest for scholars. As a result, a plethora of literature has been produced by the scholars, historians, geographers and travellers dealing with the economy of Kashmir, however, there are few works that have been fully dedicated to the theme of agrarian economy of Kashmir during the early Dogra period (1846-1885). P.N.K. Bamzai's, *Socio-Economic History of Kashmir 1846-1925,* R.L. Hangloo's *Agrarian System of Kashmir 1846-1889,* Parvez Ahmad's, *Economy and Society of Kashmir,* Parveena Akhtar's, *Socio-Economic History of Kashmir*, D. N. Dhar's *Peasantry, Kashmir- The land and its Management from Ancient to Modern times,* Ali Mohammad Wani's

thesis, *Agrarian Structure of Kashmir A.D. 1846-1947*, Chitralekha Zutshi's, *Languages of Belonging* and Mridu Rai's *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects* are some prominent works on the theme. They deal with the different aspects of agrarian economy such as crops, taxes, peasantry, assessments, irrigation and technology. To understand viewpoint of these scholars on the theme, it is necessary to produce here a broader overview of these sources.

Valley of Kashmir is a notable work on the history of Kashmir written by Sir Walter Roper Lawrence. He has given a very exhaustive account of his experiences in Kashmir. The geology, fauna, flora, history, social life, religions, agriculture, breeding, industries, trade, administration, and languages have been thoroughly discussed. While keeping a focus on economic life of Kashmir, Lawrence has produced substantial knowledge about crops, taxes, revenue officials, weights and measures, irrigation, agrarian tools and techniques. However, despite its many positives, the work is to some extent partial towards State as Lawrence served as the settlement commissioner of State from 1889 to 1895.

Ali Mohammad Wani's thesis *Agrarian Structure of Kashmir (A.D. 1846-1947*) gives a comprehensive account of the agrarian economy of Kashmir during the Dogra period. This work has used a variety of sources and dealt extensively with land ownership, types of lands, taxes and peasant resistance. However, it does not provide any substantial account about famines, and rural indebtedness.

R.L. Hangloo's *Agrarian System of Kashmir 1846-1889* is one of few prominent works that exclusively deal with the theme of agrarian economy of Kashmir during early Dogra period. By adopting a very progressive approach of history writing, author has explored many new aspects of agrarian economy which had previously been either altogether ignored or given a very less place. He has critically examined all the categories of sources and produced a holistic account about crops, soil types, irrigation, state and its relation with peasantry. Though this work is essential to understand all the key aspects of theme, however, it also suffers from some shortcomings and thus leaves ample scope for further works.

Parvez Ahmed's *Economy and Society of Kashmir*, has dealt with all the key issues of agrarian economy. These include land types, crops, irrigation, tools and implements, taxes, and

condition of peasantry. However, the author has only given a narrative account about the agrarian economy without critically examining the sources as well as the state policies.

Chitralekha Zutshi's *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of* Kashmir is a pioneering work on modern Kashmir. *By using a huge collection of* manuscripts, archival records, newspapers, personal interviews and a variety of books, *she has* unveiled many unexplored facets of the agrarian economy. She has thoroughly discussed the grain trade, attitude of revenue officials, taxation and the land settlements. Although Zutshi's work expands our understanding about the subject, yet her work is not providing sufficient details to understand the economy of Kashmir in a thorough manner.

Mridu Rai's *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir* is one of the widely appreciated work on Kashmir. She has discussed about the sovereignty of Dogra rulers and their failure to protect and promote the interests of the Muslim community. This work gives thorough account about the economy of Kashmir particularly about the agrarian sector. Oppressive taxation, corrupt bureaucracy, discriminatory and apathetic attitude of Dogra rulers, rural indebtedness and pathetic condition of peasants form the heart of this book. However, the main problem with this book is that she has overweighed the role of religion.

Objectives

1. The central objective of the study is to highlight the crop pattern of Kashmir.

2. The study aims to bring to limelight the different sources of irrigation and the tools and implements used by the peasants.

3. The study would highlight the taxation policy of the state.

4. The study also intends to explore the condition of peasantry during this period.

Methodology

To successfully achieve these objectives, huge corpus of literature will be used. These sources are archival records, Administrative reports, old census report, official Gazetteers, settlement reports, travel accounts, contemporary Persian, Urdu, Kashmiri and English works. A huge variety of secondary sources that includes books, articles, newspapers, and modern means of internet will also be used while researching on the subject. To supplement these sources, non-conventional sources like proverbs, poetry, stories and myths will be consulted to produce an inclusive view about the theme.

Chapterization

1. Introduction
2. Crop Pattern
3. Irrigation and Methods of Cultivation
4. Taxation Policy of the State
5. Condition of the Peasants
6. Conclusion

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